

West Thames Area Fisheries

Rain, rain, rain!

In the last newsletter we reported on the prospects of what effects the drought would have on our area's rivers, lakes and ponds and how we were gearing ourselves up for a potentially difficult summer. Well, as is quite often the case, Mother Nature has a knack of evening things out over time and she has certainly done a good job this time. Ironically since a number of water companies imposed a hosepipe ban in April it has not stopped raining!

At time of going to press the last of the water companies have now lifted their hosepipe bans. This comes after the wettest April (259% of the long term average) and wettest June on record, however previous to this, October 2010 to March 2011 had been the second driest 18 month period on record!

Unsurprisingly, many ponds and lakes that were dangerously low, have begun to fill up. At Hampden pond in Wendover we were poised to remove the fish, left in only inches of water. Water levels have now risen by 3 feet so thankfully the resident fish population will not be looking for a new home.



The Kennet at Fyfield (above Marlborough) in March this year

River levels and flows have recovered as well as groundwaters return to something like their normal seasonal levels. The Kennet which was dry for large sections above Marlborough is now flowing well again as groundwater recharge has rejuvenated local springs. The only notable exception is the chalk around the Chilterns where groundwater levels are still very low.



The same stretch of the Kennet in May!

However, whilst the rain has helped our local rivers, lakes and ponds recover, too much water at this time of year can pose a problem for coarse fish fry, especially in rivers. High flows and cool conditions like we have experienced for much of the summer can result in poor juvenile survival rates. In some instances drought can actually result in good spawning years for some coarse fish species as low flows and warm weather can lead to good growth rates, enabling juvenile fish a better chance of surviving their first winter. For example, the drought of 1976 produced an excellent year class of roach in many of our local rivers.

A summer of angling events!

This year we are supporting fourteen angling participation events across the area to encourage people of all ages to take up fishing. We have booked qualified coaches for many of the events and will provide loads of free tackle prize giveaways. A number of successful events have already taken place, with one seeing over 110 people try their hand at fishing! The list of events can be found below and is available to view online at www.fishactive.com/news.

Some clubs are now self-sufficient in terms of coaching and have fantastic junior programmes spread throughout the summer. We are encouraging clubs to work towards the Angling Development Board's "Clubmark for Angling" accreditation scheme, and hope all clubs can be pro-active in encouraging new people into our sport.

If you would like more information on Clubmark accreditation, are interested in becoming a qualified angling coach, or need help organising an event, please visit the Angling Development Board page on the Angling Trust website, or contact us using the contacts details below.

Angling events this summer

Angling club	Location	Date
None	Maiden Erlegh, Reading	Saturday 14 July
None	Aldershot Park, Aldershot	Saturday 21 July
Reading and District AA	Green Park, Reading	Saturday 21 July
Guildford AS	Guildford	Sunday 29 July
None	Coate Water, Swindon	Saturday 4 August
Goldsworth Park AS	Goldsworth Park, Woking	Saturday 4 August
None	Ladygrove, Didcot	Friday 10 August
Leatherhead & District AS	Leatherhead	Saturday 11 August
None	Willow Park, Ash Vale	Monday 13 August
Newbury AA	Rawlings Retreat, Newbury	Saturday 18 August
None	Rye Dyke, High Wycombe	Wednesday 22 August

Gravel washing on the Kennet

Back in April we worked with Reading and District Angling Association to jet-wash two gravel runs to improve their suitability for fish spawning. The gravels, located within the Lower Benyons fishery, had become compacted as a result of high sediment input into the River Kennet and a lack of peak flow events over recent years.



Having a blast! Del Shackleford from RDAA and Matt Drew from the EA cleaning the gravels

Dan Horsley, River Kennet fisheries officer, explained: "whilst gravel washing does not solve long-term sediment issues, in the short-term it has been shown to improve hatching rates of eggs laid by fish such as barbel and brown trout. Reducing sediment trapped amongst gravel improves water flow between it, ultimately meaning there is more oxygen available for the eggs to utilise". The gravel was jet-washed using two-inch water pumps with rigid outlet hoses, with just the top layers of gravel being cleaned to avoid dropping the bed level.

EA assist the Thames Anglers' Conservancy in Floating Pennywort removal from the Abbey River

Four members of the Thames Anglers' Conservancy were joined by the EA's Fisheries Officer for the Lower Thames, Stuart Keable, to clear a stretch of Chertsey's Abbey River of the invasive macrophyte Floating Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*).

Working from boat and bank, and employing rakes and hand removal techniques, they were able to remove over half a tonne of the invasive macrophyte in an afternoon's work above the stream's confluence with the River Thames. The rapidly proliferating plant is quick to cover the surface of slow-flowing water bodies, shading out native in-stream flora and interfering with the stream's natural ecology.



Floating pennywort. Can be a big problem

Toxic blue-green algae. Nasty but natural!

As water temperatures increase, excess nutrients in lakes and rivers can trigger toxic algal blooms to take place. This photograph was recently taken on a lake in our area suffering from a bloom of blue-green algae. The surface scum is not dissimilar to blue paint and is often found in windswept corners where dead algae accumulates. Blue-green algae is naturally occurring and produces toxins which can harm or kill animals and cause skin-rashes, fever, vomiting and diarrhoea in people. Like all algae they can be a serious problem to fish at high concentrations since they cause large fluctuations in oxygen levels, which can become dangerously low very early in the morning.



Toxic! Blue-green algae close up

Sightings of suspected blue-green algae should be reported to the owner of the water body. Where there are signs of fish in distress, such as large numbers of fish gasping at the water surface for air, please call the Environment Agency's 24-hour incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60. This number can also be found on your rod licence.

All's Wels that ends Wels!

Wels catfish have been introduced to fisheries to provide an additional attraction and draw for anglers. Providing these fish are legally stocked into the right lakes, they cause no harm to the wider environment. If wels catfish are introduced into waters with a connection to a river or in a floodplain, there is a potential for damage to native fish stocks.

In May and June six wels catfish were removed from a gravel pit in Gloucestershire. The water was adjacent to a Thames tributary and there was risk that if the river flooded the catfish could escape from the pit. The catfish have been stocked in a fully enclosed stillwater where they can continue to provide sport for anglers.

Fisheries Officer Jim Seymour said, "Thanks must go to CEFAS, the lake owners and the fish removal contractors for organizing the removal. Four of the fish were over 40lb, the largest was 64lb and these will be valued in an appropriate fishery



Captured catfish lurking in a holding tank

Anyone moving fish into or from any fishery, and using fishing instruments other than rod and line (for example electric fishing or netting) must get a written consent from the Environment Agency.

You wheelie should have a rod licence!

Our Fisheries Enforcement Officers have taken to their bikes! We'll be initially targeting the River Thames in the area of Reading and Oxford, but will also use the bikes for patrols on a wide range of other waters. This will help us to check more rod licences & enforce fisheries law generally. Call the hotline 0800 80 70 60 if you see any illegal activity.



Enforcement Officer Mick Cox with angler Phil Capel at Gold Valley Fishery

Anglers check their flies!

With abundant hatches of mayfly starting to emerge on our rivers, the first group of Thames anglers to join the Anglers Monitoring Initiative spent a full day training with the Riverfly Partnership at the EA's Shepperton Lock facility this month. The EA funded session was attended by a dozen members of the Thames Angling Conservancy, a group intimately familiar with the Thames and its tributaries. After an initial briefing the group moved to Thames tributary the River Ember, where they were coached in sampling and identification techniques by Louis Kitchen of the Riverfly Partnership and the EA's June Jones.

The Anglers Monitoring Initiative scheme which is run by the Riverfly Partnership will provide training to angling groups who can establish monitoring groups to sample their chosen river. By using a simple set of eight river fly indicator species data can then be collected on the health of the river.

TAC's chairman Dave Harvey said 'Anglers are natural guardians of the river environment and are in an ideal position to monitor the health of the watercourses they fish and know well. The AMI is used alongside routine monitoring by the Environment Agency and ensures that water quality is checked more widely and action taken at the earliest opportunity should any problems be detected.'

New juvenile habitat created on the Thames

The EA and Thames Water have recently worked together to create much needed juvenile habitat on the River Thames at Pinkhill adjacent to Farmoor Reservoir. By creating a new channel to link up a newly dug reedbed and the Thames it has created a large backwater.

As regular readers of the newsletter will know we here at the EA are great fans of backwaters on rivers as they act as refuge areas from high flows for all life stages of fish. But most importantly they provide vital nursery areas for juvenile fish, providing shallow, warm environments enabling good growth rates which can help promote better survival rates through the first winter. This has obvious benefits for the river's fish populations.

This section of the Thames is currently not meeting good ecological potential (GEP) under the Water Framework Directive with fish being one of the failing elements. It is hoped with projects of this nature that GEP will soon be achieved.



The new connection between the reedbed and the Thames

Loddon Rivers Week – Implementing the Water Framework Directive

We did it! A big thank you to seventy plus enthusiastic volunteers of varied backgrounds and ages for turning up to deliver habitat improvements for Loddon Rivers Week. This exciting initiative was supported by ourselves in partnership with the Wild Trout Trust, Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership, Loddon Fisheries and Conservation Consultative and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust.

Over 30 practical habitat enhancements were completed on the Blackwater, Loddon and Whitewater by eight teams, each led by experts. Work included creating gravel spawning grounds; installing large woody debris to change river morphology (shape) to scour pools, clean spawning grounds and improve habitat complexity; adding cover for fish and other wildlife; and planting native wetland plant species.



Hard at it!

At Arborfield bypass channel, fish passage was further improved by slowing the water down through the channel's exit to facilitate upstream movement.

To support local people carrying out further work, a draft Environment Agency flood defence consent advice pack was circulated together with advice on undertaking habitat improvement work such as adding woody debris, creating backwaters and spawning habitat enhancement.



The enthusiastic volunteers!

It's marginal at Goldsworth Park Lake

A long running partnership project at Goldsworth Park Lake to improve habitat for fish and wildlife has seen a delivery of several different species of marginal plants. Goldsworth Park Lake is situated in the centre of

Goldsworth Park housing estate, Woking and is a very popular location for the general public.

The plants which were donated by the Environment Agency are to be introduced to the wildlife area of the lake and should establish quickly as this is a great time of the year for planting. Work parties organised by the Goldsworth Park Anglers and the Community association will see volunteers put on their waders and will be busy planting over the next few weeks.

Once established the plants will provide areas to spawn for adult fish, refuge and hiding places for fish fry, invertebrates and will create habitat for nesting birds.

This work is just part of many improvements benefiting fish and wildlife which have been carried out at Goldsworth Park Lake over the past few years and is an excellent example of a successful partnership project.



Irene Watson and Roger Westcott examine the new plants.

Rod Licence Checks

Our Enforcement Officers in West Thames checked 4579 anglers for rod licences in January, February and March. Of those 220 failed to produce a valid licence. These anglers have been reported for possible prosecution.

Contact Us

If you would like any further information about any articles in this newsletter or have any other queries please contact Tom Sherwood

tom.sherwood@environment-agency.gov.uk
tel: 01491 828358
Environment Agency
Red Kite House
Howbery Park.
Wallingford OX10 8BD